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ABSTRACT

A taxonomy of stages in the development of values concepts is presented and illustrated. In addition, the role of direct and social feedback in the evolution of an individual's values is examined. Level I of the taxonomy, Developing Behavior Patterns, is a pre-values stage experienced in early childhood. At this stage, the infant learns what he should and should not do, based upon feedback about his behavior. While such behavior patterns are not values, they serve that function, acting as a base for decisions about how to interact with people and things outside the individual. Level II, Developing Behavior Standards, represents a change from patterns to continuing standards, from individual situations to classes of situations. Again, while not values, the standards serve as the basis for decision making and thus fulfill the function of values. Level III, Developing Insight into Behaviors, is the level at which a concept of values arises. This concept is then used to learn from and relate to actions, decisions, and judgments. At Level IV, Developing a Constancy Between Behavior and Values, the individual knows what his values are or is able to surface them to influence his actions and decisions. He is more able to consciously anticipate and respond to situations in which there is a potential for values conflict, to recognize the role of values and data, and to understand the interrelationship between them as they influence his decisions, actions, and judgments. (MJB)

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# A NOTION OF NATURAL VALUES DEVELOPMENT

By

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TSC 1075-14

## A NOTION OF NATURAL VALUES DEVELOPMENT

Often as we participate in discussions about values, an unspoken message that seems to come across is that values are "things out there", all ordered in a guide book with a title something like, Rules To Live By. In our view, such lists of values often have little significance. Rather, it's those values that live inside of people that are important; the special property of each individual.

What follows is a way of thinking about how an individual's values evolve from a rudimentary set of behavior patterns to what we call functional values. This development is organized into four levels. We refer to Level I as Developing Behavior Patterns: Pre Values, Level II as Developing Behavior Standards: Intuitive Values, Level III as Developing Insight Into Behavior Standards: Awareness Values, and Level IV as Developing A Consistency Between Behavior and Values: Functional Values.

The movement of individuals through these levels is an unfolding process that closely parallels their physical, mental, and social development. Although the behavior of all normal children can be related to the first level of development, it doesn't necessarily follow that growing and developing carries with it the automatic movement through levels two and three, into level four. Perhaps this is because not all adults are actively concerned about their values or the values of others. Perhaps it is the fault of our educational system because work in the arena of values isn't based on a concept of value that makes sense to our students. Perhaps it's due to an individual's intellectual capabilities or the environment in which he matures or both. And, there may be other reasons.

### LEVEL I

### DEVELOPING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS: PRE VALUES

As the infant begins to interact with his immediate surroundings, he begins to learn two kinds of things: what he should and shouldn't do. For example, when the child crawls around on the

living room floor and pushes the fuzzy ball, mother and father smile and offer him sounds of encouragement.

He gets the message: *"This must be good."* On the other hand, he may invite sounds of displeasure or even a slap on the hand when he artfully throws a spoon full of food onto the kitchen floor. The message, *"That's not so good."*

Even his extra-human environment communicates such messages to him. When he pets the family cat, it makes a nice sound and may gently rub against him. On the other hand, to pull the cat's tail results in another kind of sound and perhaps even a scratch or two.

He also finds that to crawl around on the bed is soft and fun, but to try to crawl from the bed to the floor is another story.

All of these kinds of events offer the youngster some feedback about his behavior. Some things he does mean good news for him. Some mean bad news. Such good news and bad news facilitate his development of behavior patterns.

A behavior pattern is a specific behavior that is repeated under similar circumstances. *"I should play carefully with Barbara's football"*, is based on what has happened to him when he played with Barbara's football in the past. *"I shouldn't hit Clyde"*, is based on what has happened to him in the past when he did. *"I ought to drink my milk"*, is based on what Mother has said or done when milk has been placed before him at the table.

In growing from infancy to the world of the primary grades, the child's interactions with others broaden to include the kids in his class and school, his teachers, and other adults. He finds that these people also communicate *"good"* and *"not-so-good"* messages to him. This serves as more information for him about how others respond to what he does and doesn't do. As a result, his range of behavior patterns expands to accommodate his widening world. However, of all the feedback the child gets as he interacts with his environment, it's primarily the way other humans act and react that lay the foundations for his values.

Of course, because a child adopts a behavior pattern doesn't necessarily mean he will conform to it. If that were true, there would be no such thing as risk-taking! And, it doesn't necessarily mean that the child is able to verbalize these patterns of behavior. It does mean, however, that you can see evidence of them in the child's behavior as he interacts with others and with his environment.

Perhaps what is of greatest significance in these very early stages of development is that, while behavior patterns are not values, they serve as values for the young child. That is, they serve as a base for his decisions about how he interacts with others and things around him.

LEVEL II

## DEVELOPING BEHAVIOR STANDARDS: INTUITIVE VALUES

For most young children, behavior patterns are all they need to deal with their world. As they mature, however, their increasing interactions with others results in an every widening array of behavior patterns. To cope with the increasing number of behavior patterns, a new level of development may emerge. The individual conceptualizes and adopts behavior standards.

A behavior standard is a "rule for behaving" or a cultural or subcultural norm which speaks to a range of relating situations. For example, such behavior patterns as, *"I shouldn't break Jamie's toy car when I play with it", "I shouldn't ride off the curb with Hilda's bicycle", "I should take care of Caleb's dollhouse"* are generalized and may become a behavior standard such as, *"I should be careful when using things that belong to other people."* As in the case of behavior patterns, behavior standards serve as "values" in the absence of conceptualized values.

LEVEL III

## DEVELOPING INSIGHT INTO BEHAVIOR STANDARDS: AWARENESS VALUES

There is little doubt that behavior patterns and behavior standards are an outgrowth of the values of the society or sub culture of which one is a part. At the Awareness of Value Level, the individual is engaged both in developing a concept of value and in using that concept as a way to learn about himself and his culture. For example, at this level, the individual moves beyond a behavior standard such as, *"I should be careful when using things that belong to other people"*, to the identification of a value that undergirds this standard such as *"consideration for the property of others."*

An individual may develop a concept of value in many different ways. These ways may range from adopting "textbook" definition on the one hand, to intuiting a concept of value for himself. With an understanding of a concept of value, he may become aware of his values through social dialogue or through reflective thinking. Someone e se may make observations about what they believe his values to be by drawing inferences from what he says and does. Of course, the individual may accept or reject such comments. Or, he can utilize a process whereby he is able to surface his values for himself.

Actually, becoming aware of one's own values seldom occurs as a result of one or the other of these approaches alone. Some values are best surfaced through social dialogue while some values are best surfaced by the individual for himself. This latter type process involves reflective thinking and evolves from the question, *"What is important to me about...?"* It is also based on the individual's ability to infer values from and relate them to actions, decisions, and judgments.

LEVEL IV

## DEVELOPING A CONSISTENCY BETWEEN BEHAVIOR AND VALUES: FUNCTIONAL VALUES

At this level of development, an individual has gone far beyond using behavior standards as a base for his behavior alone. His efforts at the Awareness Level have yielded him an operational concept of value and the ability to use it. As a result, he moves to the Functional Level at which he either knows what his priority values are, or he is able to surface the values that influence his actions, judgments and decisions. In addition, he is more able to consciously anticipate and respond to situations in which there is a potential for values conflict. He also recognizes the role of both values and data and the interrelationship between them as they influence his decisions, actions, and judgments.

Societal values and the need for their continuing examination and reordering become a major concern for the individual at this level. This concern manifests itself in dialogue about the values of society with special attention to how conditions act on and influence a society's current prioritization of values. He is able, ready, and willing to make a case for values he considers essential to an effective society. He consciously behaves consistent with such values and may try to encourage others to do so as well.

## THE INFLUENCE OF FEEDBACK ON VALUES DEVELOPMENT

So far, a process whereby individuals develop values from childhood to adulthood has been discussed. However, not all of a child's emerging values are what their parents or others would like them to be. Perhaps because of their egocentric orientation, some individual's values grow irrespective of the fact that those values may foster actions that yield negative consequences for them or others. Yet, some time later, the same individual may behave quite differently in a similar situation. For example, consider the nine year old who "forgets" to brush his teeth weeks on end, while at age seventeen, the same individual brushes his teeth twice a day regularly.

Since one's values are a base for decisions about actions, a change in behavior suggests either that the individual's values have changed or that his values priorities have changed.

Note the two ways of explaining this same phenomenon; the individual's values changed, or his values priorities changed. One view holds that a given value may be modified or discarded, to be replaced by another value. The second view takes the position that all people hold essentially the same values. It's rather a question when specific values are used as a base for an individual's actions. Which view we use is immaterial. What is of significance is that either people's values or values priorities change over time. The issue of concern to educators is, *"What happened to bring about that change?"* In our view, the same process that influenced the development of the value in the first place may serve to reinforce an individual's value or stimulate the reconsideration of a value; namely, values feedback.

Earlier in this section we described how infants get *"good"* and *"not-so-good"* messages about their behavior from their environment. All such messages are feedback for the individual; data for him in relation to how his actions made him and others feel. An individual may get direct or vicarious feedback about his behavior or about his values. Direct feedback about behavior happens as an individual behaves and (1) is sensitive to his own responses to what he did, and/or (2) observes the responses of others to him. For example, consider the situation in which Creighton has had four or five drinks at a party after a school dance. He gets direct feedback about his behavior both as he feels "shaky" and as he overhears some of his friends commenting about his unstable condition. It's personal feedback for him. In essence, living is behaving, and every time an individual behaves he has an opportunity to get direct feedback about his behavior if he is sensitive to it.

Fortunately, human beings don't have to experience everything for themselves to learn. The world is also rich with opportunities to observe the behavior of others. We refer to this as vicarious feedback, or social learning. Vicarious feedback about behavior happens as an individual observes both the behavior of someone else and the effects of that behavior. By relating the two, he gains some insight into how others might respond to him in a similar

situation. Again, let's consider the situation in which Creighton has had four or five drinks at a party. An observer may be sensitive to his own reactions to Creighton's behavior and or to the responses of others to him. Vicarious feedback about behavior may also happen as a result of reading an article or a book, watching films, gossiping over the back fence or participating in group discussions, role playing, role reversal situations, or other group dynamic activities.

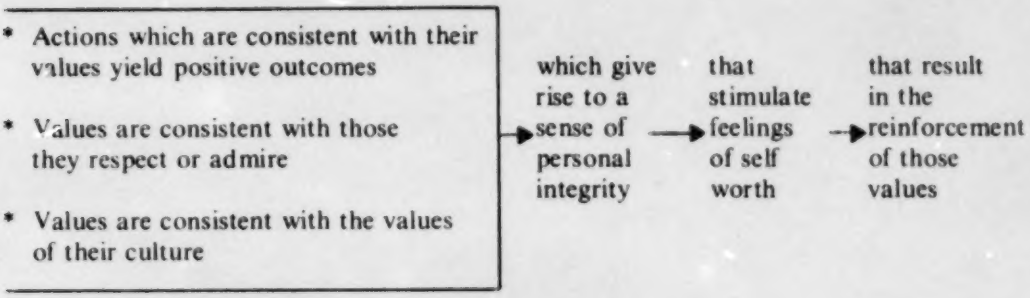
When an individual has a concept of value, he may also utilize direct or vicarious feedback about his values rather than about his behavior alone. Direct values feedback may happen in a social setting as an individual responds with agreement or disagreement. It may happen as an individual asks others about what their values are. He then relates what he hears to his values. Vicarious values feedback may happen for an individual as he observes how others respond to someone who has reported one of their values. Both direct or vicarious feedback may be utilized by individuals no matter what their level of values development. For individuals at the Pre-Values or Intuitive Values levels, the feedback is related to behavior patterns or behavior standards respectively. However, because individuals at the Awareness of Values and Functional Values levels have a concept of value, they are able to go one step further with their feedback; they can also relate the feedback about behavior to the values which underlie that behavior. Consequently, whether direct or vicarious feedback serves as feedback about behavior patterns, behavior standards, or values depends primarily on the individual's level of values development.

The chart which follows summarizes ways in which feedback may reinforce one's values or stimulate the reexamination of them.

## Feedback and Values Reinforcement

Values reinforcement takes place as

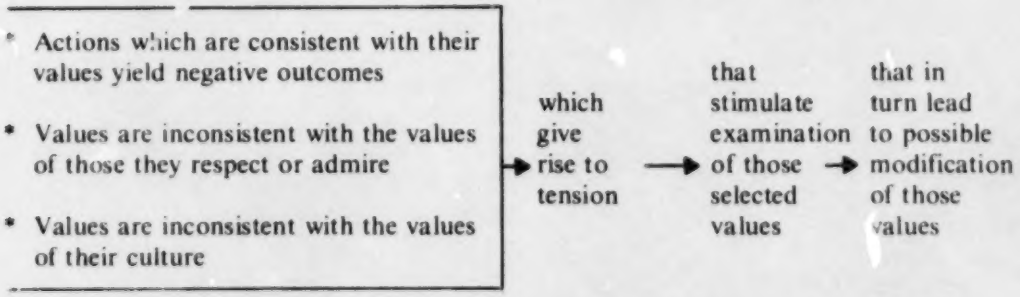
people perceive that their:


* Actions which are consistent with their values yield positive outcomes
* Values are consistent with those they respect or admire
* Values are consistent with the values of their culture
which give rise to a sense of personal integrity
that stimulate feelings of self worth
that result in the reinforcement of those values

## Feedback and the Need for Values Modification

Values modification may be stimulated

as people perceive that their:


* Actions which are consistent with their values yield negative outcomes
* Values are inconsistent with the values of those they respect or admire
* Values are inconsistent with the values of their culture
which give rise to tension
that stimulate examination of those selected values
that in turn lead to possible modification of those values